

Senior Essay

A COMPARISON OF SOME ASPECTS
OF CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most persistent challenges to Christianity by a non-Christian is that presented by Hinduism. This challenge has been noted on the American scene, particularly in its intellectual approach. One writer on the subject has become disturbed sufficiently that he frankly states that it is necessary that the people in the world make a choice between the claims of Jesus Christ and those of other world religions. He notes that the choice is most pressing between Christianity and Hinduism even more than between Christianity and other religions. He believes that Hinduism in its most recent form, the Vedanta philosophy taught by the Ramakrishna Mission, is the most subtle and powerful and the most dangerous opponent of Christianity in the world today.¹ This being the case, perhaps more understanding of Hinduism is in order. Co-equal purposes of this paper are to present a comparison of some aspects of these two religions with some interpretation of the Hindu religion as understood by various writers, and,

¹Edmund Davison Soper, The Inevitable Choice (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 13.

then an interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism. In the light of Dr. Edmund Soper's concern, as noted above, what should be the relationship? Are we Christians justified in believing that our religious faith is unique?

The information given concerning Hinduism in general may as well be applied to the Vedanta philosophy specifically. For purposes of this essay the material selected does not differentiate sufficiently between the two to cause separate sections to be written. In fact, some of the references seem to use the two interchangeably--if they consider the Vedanta philosophy at all. Unless specific reference is noted in the text, the information may be considered to apply to both equally. In the Western world today the layman may speak of "the influence of Hinduism" while the experts may be more specific and speak of "the influence of the Vedanta Philosophy."

This student relies heavily upon interpretation and critique of Hinduism by other persons of scholarly credibility in this paper. The subject is difficult to understand, and there is even some disagreement among the experts as to what it meant by certain words and even more disagreement as to the intentions of the followers of Hinduism today.

II. HINDUISM - WHAT IS IT?

Hinduism is difficult--often impossible--to define. It includes many sects, institutions, religious cults, and tendencies, having within its framework just about every variation of religious expression among human beings. The religion includes the elaborate ritual that goes with the many phases of life; the serene mystic experience of oneness; the feasts steeped in a confusing atmosphere of polytheism and demonism, and magic. The religion that goes by the name of Hinduism is so complex that one could find it impossible to give an adequate impression.²

It is generally accepted that all forms of religious life that belong to Hinduism agree in two fundamental things. Hendrik Kraemer notes that every Hindu belongs to a caste and he has to live according to its peculiar type of behavior that is his predestined lot. The Hindu word for this peculiar type of behavior is dharma to which one has been cosmically and socially predestined.³ Kraemer enlarges upon

²Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1961), p. 159.

³Ibid.

the fundamentals of Hinduism in another book where he writes that four points govern the orthodoxy of the Hindu: 1. He accepts the absolute authority of the Hindu Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Vedas; and the Upanishads, Bhagavadgita and the Brahmasutras; 2, He must accept the caste system because it remains, as Gandhi believed, the right principle of social structure. 3. He believes in the sacredness of the cow, and 4. He allows the cult of sacred images.⁴

Hinduism is full of paradoxes and the moment one makes any general statement about the religion he must put some limitations upon it in some way.

The bewildering variety, the endless range of religious experience and practice, comprising the highest peaks and the basest depths of human experience, the paradoxical contrasts in the field of doctrine where pantheism, atheism and a thousand sorts of polytheism are alike possible and recognized, become clear, however, at once if one realizes that Hinduism is the outstanding and characteristic embodiment of the primitive apprehension of existence and of naturalistic monism. It is as wide, as polymorphous, as full of fierce contrasts and fine shades, as capricious, as Nature is. With this in mind, it becomes at once clear as daylight why in Hinduism every cult, every doctrine, every form of worship is received with gracious and literally inexhaustible hospitality. All have their proper place. There is no immutable criterion of truth, and the power of

⁴Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 102.

absorption, reception, and production in Hinduism is endless. Of course, this is so for Nature is inexhaustibly hospitable; it is eternally absorbing and producing; it knows no criterion and cannot know a real one, because all is contained in and issues from its womb, and it knows only the difference of grades and shades, because there is no absolute standard of reference above or outside it.⁵

If we keep in mind the statement above, we shall be able to understand that much of the Hindu approach to religion and life seems too inconsistent to us Westerners. The only attempt by Hinduism to have some authoritative standard and source for its system has been to declare that their Scriptures, the Vedas, are of divine and sacred revelation. However, the Vedas either ignore or contradict the fundamental tenets of Hinduism as it has been known through more than two thousand years. This is not an indication of inconsistency, but a startling example of Hindu consistency. The careless disregard of the real character of a criterion is a clear expression of the naturalist-monistic spirit by which the manifestations of Hinduism are affected or animated. Just as Nature is interested in shades, in realizations, so Hinduism is ultimately not interested in religious truth, but in the

⁵Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, p. 160.

endless possibilities of religious expression and realization. Thus, Hinduism does not even have to take its own sacred criterion of truth and revelation seriously "because its dealing in practice, rather lightheartedly with its own authority is an expression of its inherent criterion less naturalist-ministic nature."⁶

Thus far we have noted that the various manifestations of Hinduism are valid. Dr. Edmund Perry notes that this validity is possible because of two affirmations in Hinduism. One is the oneness of reality; and the second is the unity and validity of all views of this one reality. The first affirmation is absolutely inflexible and all-inclusive, and the second one is infinitely inflexible and all-inclusive. In one inclusive company are the castes and sub-castes with their practices and regulations. All the Hindu sects with their disparate and otherwise contradictory affirmations, cults, symbols, and rituals are included in one household. There are no differences of opinion, no pairs of opposites, no contradictions in human thought, language or practice which are not represented in the confines of Hinduism. Among

⁶Ibid., p. 161.

Hindus are the most profound meta-physicians as well as the most primitive nature worshippers. The most convinced atheists and the most committed theists are Hindus. The sincerest polytheists and the most confident monotheists are Hindu. And, the most amazing part of this whole scheme is that no one apparently tries to dissuade the other from his view.⁷

According to Dr. Perry, this is probably the basis for the hospitality shown by Hinduism to other religions. The two great affirmations encompass all other religions as well. In this sense every man is a good Hindu, regardless of whether he calls himself a Baptist or United Methodist, or Nazarine, or any other name, so long as he earnestly and honestly strives to fulfill the tenets of the religion of his choice. Hinduism encourages man to develop and maintain his own spiritual vision.⁸

A person may join formally the company of Hindus, but even so, he is reminded of the high esteem in which is held the religion he is deserting. Therefore, a man may become a

⁷Edmund Perry, The Gospel in Dispute (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958), p. 175.

⁸Ibid., p. 176.

Hindu as he had become a Buddhist or Christian--in order to reach the spiritual goal beyond all systems and religions. The Hindus reminds us to be concerned with building up each other that men may be enabled to reach that goal which is the common goal of all men in their spiritual aspirations. It is evident that Dr. Perry writes admiringly of the contributions of Hinduism.⁹ And, to fortify his statement, he quotes, seemingly with approval, some words from East and West, The End of Their Separation, a book published in 1952 by S. Radhakrishnan, who is probably the foremost exponent of Hinduism, and particularly the Vedanta philosophy, in the Western world. Certainly, Radhakrishnan is the most articulate.

The truth which is the kernal of every religion is one and the same; doctrines, however, differ considerably since they are the applications of the truth to the human situation. . . . All are necessarily inadequate and if taken too literally lead to error. Every formula, every attempt to enclose reality within words and concepts, which is true within limits and is adapted to the time and the occasion, will serve as a support of contemplation, an aid toward the understanding of that which can be enclosed in no formula, symbol, doctrine. The doctrines are not irresponsible. We cannot think as we like.

⁹Ibid.,

Nor are they unnecessary. The language in which truth is expressed consists of many dialects adapted to the needs of the different peoples.¹⁰

Hinduism teaches that all life is one and is divine. Every order of life is a distinctive manifestation of the Spirit, and that manifestation has its own peculiar status. There is a gradual ascent to be observed in the manifestations of the Spirit. As the Hindu teacher would say, "Deity is nearer to pure spirit than man; man is nearer to pure spirit than animality; animality is nearer than plants, and plants are nearer than matter." Really, the process of spiritual progression is the evolution of life and that progress in Spirit is the only true progress.¹¹

The Hindus teach us that we are not to despise ourselves¹² for what we are, but we are to try to determine and then to accommodate ourselves to our basic bent. One person, therefore, is not better than another, for each person is a manifestation of Spirit, even though one may be a better manifestation of Spirit. We can judge ourselves only

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 177-178.

¹¹Ibid., p. 180.

¹²Ibid., p. 181.

by ourselves, for each person must evaluate his own life according to the nature of his own gifts and by the progress that he makes within his life span.

The Hindu seers have commended a four-fold guidance for every human life because they recognized the difficulty that the individual has in defining the proper goal for the several tendencies in his own life. The kama purpose of life calls for the expression of the natural impulses of man in such a way that the common good will be promoted and the individual's spiritual refinement will be heightened. For example, family life for the Hindu is as important as is the ascetic life and has its own contributions to make. The artha purpose of life calls for the individual to be satisfied with the acquisition of wealth and possessions according to his ability and willingness to improve the material value of these possessions. These values are held at the same time for the spiritual benefit of all mankind and for the greater spiritual growth of the individual's own life. This purpose entails responsibility to and for the economic order as well as to and for the individual. A man does not achieve this end until his desire and ability to have wealth and property are so directed that they influence the common efforts of all to raise the

standard of living. The dharma purpose of life for the Hindu calls for the satisfaction of our desire to be accepted by and to the society. Only when an individual is willing to work in the group without trying to manipulate other participants or is willing to surrender his own responsibility to the collective will can this purpose then be fulfilled. Thus, some commentators believe that a central concern in the revived Hinduism is a concern for the whole social order. This purpose supposedly is the reason that Hindus are working zealously for world order and peace and that the cause of justice and equality will be strengthened wherever Hinduism's story is told. The moksha purpose of life fulfills the individual's desire to know and achieve the meaning and destiny of his total life. This purpose should find its fulfillment in spiritual freedom and, therefore, it determines and corrects the other three ends or purposes of life.¹³

Hinduism's final and supreme aim is spiritual liberation. The aim is not to make perfect human beings either in this life or the next, because no human being is spiritually liberated, however, perfect he may be. Rather, the aim is to

¹³Ibid., pp. 182-185.

advance men to a level of being above and other than human beings. The Hindu sages do not perceive the best existence to be that of eternal preservation of human personality, but the ultimate aim is to make each and all one with the one ultimate Reality, Spirit. We came from Spirit; we must return to Spirit. Technically, the problem is not one of making us one with Spirit, nor to reunite us with Spirit, but to make us aware of how we are one and how we are one with Spirit. Hindu sages remind us that our greatest dilemma is unawareness. The cause of our unawareness, the symptom, is the disease--ignorance. Our insufficient knowledge alienates us from ourselves and wastes all our energies.¹⁴

What about the man who is free--who is liberated? A native Hindu, in writing about immortality, advises that the soul of the liberated man does not go any place where it has not been from the beginning, nor does it become anything other than what it has always been--non-dual, eternal, all-pervading, immortal. The spiritually liberated man has awakened from his slumber of ignorance and he does not dream any more of unreal objects. All his doubts have been removed because he has realized Truth. He is conscious of the Godhead within

¹⁴Ibid., p. 185.

himself, and, therefore, he is not disturbed by pain and pleasure, good and evil. The liberated man is never unaware of his true nature of blessedness and immortality. He knows that his body and the physical universe are illusory. Because he has realized the whole universe in his soul, he is totally free from all desire--for children, wealth, and happiness in heaven. If a man sees in himself the whole universe and is completely satisfied with himself, what else can he desire? He sees God with eyes closed as well as with eyes open. Whenever he mediates he sends his blessings for the universe; he dedicates himself to the welfare of all in his actions. The spiritually liberated man does not have to be affected by the results of his past actions, because his past actions were done at a time when he dreamed of himself as a finite individual being. Now, he is awake from his dream. And, dream activities cannot affect a man when he is awake. Truth has swallowed up both the illusory action and the illusory actor.¹⁵

¹⁵Swami Nikhilananda, Essence of Hinduism (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1946), --. 39-42.

A liberated man is not bound by the scriptures or social conventions. The rules of ethics cannot restrict him. Yet, he cannot do anything that is whimsical or dtermimental to the welfare of others. He does not seek moral virtues; they cling to him.

A liberated man, conscious of the immortal and illumined nature of the soul, is no longer concerned about bondage or liberation, which are characteristics of the mind. He has realized the inspiring words of the Upanishad: 'There is neither death nor birth, neither a struggling nor a bound soul, neither a seeker after liberation, nor a liberated one--this, indeed, is the ultimate truth.' By the birth of a man who has attained liberation through the realization of the soul's immorality and its oneness with the Godhead, his family becomes sinless, his mother blessed, and the very earth hallowed.¹⁶

Hinduism does have important common Scriptures, as has been noted previously. One of these is the Bedas and the other, the Bhagavata Purana. D. S. Sarma notes that the rest of the Hindu scriptures are more or less sectional or sectarian. The Vedas are said to be eternal, their composers being only the channels through which the revelations have come. All the secondary scriptures derive their authority from the Vedas, and they are accepted authoritatively only insofar as their teaching is in line with the primary scriptures. These secondary scriptures include the epics, the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 42.

codes of law, the sacred romances, the manuals of philosophy, and the sectarian scriptures.¹⁷

Hinduism provides for a concept of God, as indicated in a chapter by Jitendra Nath Banerjea, who is a faculty member at the University of Calcutta.¹⁸ The most important elements in the religious thought of the Hindu, according to Mr. Banerjea, include faith in the existence of one spiritual reality, generally conceived as a personal God. An intelligent Hindu considers God as residing within himself, controlling all his actions, and at the same time God is outside him, manifested in numerous ways, unknown and known. The Hindu belief in both the imminence and transcendence of the divine is expressed "Thousand-headed was the Supreme Being," thousand-eyed and thousand-footed. Covering the world all around, He yet exceeded it by a span. All this is the Supreme Being, what is past and what is in the future; He is the Lord of immortality as well as of that which grows by food (moral creatures)."

The Supreme Being, the neutral and impersonal Brahman

¹⁷Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., The Religion of the Hindus (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 7.

¹⁸Ibid., Chapter 2, pp. 43-82.

of the earlier Upanishads, is also known as a personal God. The concept of the God who resides in the heart of all beings plays an important part in the spiritual life of the Hindu. The feeling of loving adoration which the Hindu has in his heart for God is called bhakti. There are different types of this feeling, but the highest type is that which does not determined, by any conditions, and which does not seek for the fulfillment of any desire. The ideal type of devotion is found in the Bhagavata Purenā. The God says,

As the waters of the Ganges flow incessantly towards the ocean, so do the minds of those (devotees having the ideal type of bhakti for their God) move constantly towards me, the Supreme Person residing in every heart, immediately they hear about My qualities. They have no desire for the fruits of their actions, and (they know) that there is no real barrier between them and Me (III).¹⁹

Though the Hindu's belief in one supreme reality beyond the measure of name and form has been persistent in India for many years, his devotion for his God has led him to give to the object of his meditation and worship various names and forms. Though it may appear that the Hindu has to do with many different Gods; however, these are really the external manifestations of one great principle as the Hindu has

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

conceived them. Underlying the various mythologies is the idea of one divine dispenser of justice, the destroyer of evil and benefactor of the good, the one creator, sustainer, and absorber of the world.²⁰

S. Radhakrishnan is considered the spokesman for so-called modern India. He is an able and prolific writer and lecturer in many universities. His book, The Hindu View of Life, is composed of a series of lectures at Manchester College, Oxford. He is considered to be an expert refuter of the Christian claim for true universality.²¹

Radhakrishnan takes his stand in the Vedanta philosophy. One of the things that must be kept in mind is that Radhakrishnan is the present-day apologist for Hindu thinking and culture over against the West. Religion for him is above all experience, more specifically mystical experience, and so he places experience above authority. The Vedas record the experiences of souls that are strongly endowed with the sense for reality and, therefore, they can be re-experienced. Radhakrishnan claims that Hinduism is totally undogmatic and this tolerance is one of the central motives in Hindu thought. In

²⁰Ibid., p. 82.

²¹Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 99.

Hinduism all spheres of life are acknowledged and all are accorded their appropriate place and mutual relations within the system.²²

Radhakrishnan insists that the truth and authority of all Religions is a Hindu characteristic. Religions are the expression of the various moods of the human mind.²³ The apologist becomes more expansive and acknowledges that Hinduism accepts all religions and notions as facts and then arranges them in the order of their more or less intrinsic significance. "The bewildering polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising monotheism of the classes are for the Hindu the expression of one and the same force at different levels."²⁴ The method of Hinduism has not been to cut away the tropical growth of magic and obscurantism, but, rather, the method is one of sapping the foundations than cutting the growth. Radhakrishnan is faintly critical of Hinduism because during the last few centuries it has not been faithful to what it knew

²²Ibid., p. 122.

²³S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1927), p. 29.

²⁴Ibid., p. 32.

to be the highest, and so, the task of uplifting the uncivilized has been sadly neglected. Yet, notwithstanding the failures, the Hindu solution of the problem of the plurality of religions and claims for truth, and the One truth, is the solution, because it is in seeking the unity of religion "not in a common creed, but in a common quest."²⁵

III. THE RELATIONSHIP AND COMPARISON OF SOME ASPECTS OF CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM

What, then, shall we say to this? Is there a point of contact between the two religions? I am not certain that I shall be able to delineate such points, if there are any. However, there are considerations about each religion which, when noted, may make it wise to leave the decisions for points of contact to the wisdom of each reader.

First, let us consider that all the wrong is not on the side of Christianity (though some strong condemnation will be noted later). It simply is not the case that Christianity and its advocates are the only prejudiced religious people in the

²⁵Ibid., pp. 52-58.

world. Such a man as Radhakrishnan, the speaker for modern India and the Hindu religion, either evidences a complete misunderstanding or disquiet when he discusses Christianity.²⁶ In spite of his stance of tolerance, he evidences very little of it when he speaks thus:

Christianity is a syncretistic faith,
A blend of various earlier creeds. .
in spite of its anxiety for system, this
is lacking. . . . Eastern religions aim
at producing saints and heroes, Western,
men that are sensible and happy. . . .
The emphasis on definite creeds and
absolutist dogmatism, with its conse-
quences of intolerance, exclusiveness
and confusion of piety with patriarchy
are the striking features of Western
Christianity.²⁷

He says this in spite of the universal ethics and virtues of Jesus. The question may very well be asked whether the Hindu representatives are really as tolerant as they wish us to believe.

Although Radhakrishnan declares that Hindu tolerance stems from the Hindu theory that every human being has individuality worthy of reverence. Kraemer points out that this is not a Hindu²⁸ theory at all, but a recent Western idea derived

²⁶Kraemer, op. cit., p. 129.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 130.

from Christianity. On the other hand, Dr. Perry advises us that Hinduism presents us with two challenges which we would do well to consider: to pursue carefully some way mapped out for us by our native faith; and, at all times to keep ourselves open to the enrichments which travelers of other ways may offer us. We must be ready, also, to take up another route of life if the one we are following leads to a dead end.²⁹

Dr. Perry claims that Christians have exaggerated the concreteness and singularity of the Incarnation in Jesus, of the identification of God with the flesh and bones of Jesus of Nazareth. This has obscured the ultimately spiritual nature of the revelation and of faith.

Christian faith encourages men to pre-occupy themselves with particulars, with visibilities, with things. The consequence of this is the identification of Christianity with some secular culture and with the particular interests of certain political and economic institutions. The particularity and limitation of Incarnation in the Christian message makes it difficult for Hinduism to imagine how Christianity can resist the temptation to team up with colonialism or imperialism or some other specific manifestation of secular manifestation of secular power.³⁰

²⁹Perry, op. cit., p. 189.

³⁰Ibid., p. 194.

Perry goes on to note that the uniqueness of the Incarnation is more offensive to the Hindu than is the idea of God residing in mortal flesh. So, Perry insists that there must die in Hinduism the refusal to admit that historical uniqueness is real and that difference in men's understanding of God are ultimately real and divisive.³¹

Dr. Soper reminds us that the charge is often made that Hinduism, in the Vedanta form, is broad-minded in looking upon every religion as true and worthy, while Christianity is said to be intolerant, dogmatic, exclusive, and narrow-minded. The Vedanta looks upon all religions as essentially true while Christianity does not. Christianity has certain doctrines which are considered essential, without which it would cease to exist as a distinct religion. Does not this hold true with Hindu Vedanta as well?

The very life of Sri Ramakrishna is an interpretation and validification of that ancient Vedic teaching that Truth is one, which is taken to mean that all religions are one and the same. This is believed and proclaimed as tenaciously and confidently as any Christian doctrine. Moreover, everything in their attitude, including that toward other faiths, is directly related to an even more fundamental doctrine; namely,

³¹Ibid., p. 222.

that there is a unifying principle in the universe, the Absolute Brahman. Even more than this, Brahman, as we have seen, is held to be the final reality in the universe. Without this doctrine the Vedantists would be shorn of the most characteristic and determinative feature in their thinking.³²

The sense of mission in Christianity sets up at least some considerations for the relationship and comparison of some of the aspects between Christianity and Hinduism. God spoke and revealed himself to the Old Testament prophets, but, even beyond that revelation, God has made known his nature and will in Christ as the most authentic disclosure of himself that has ever been or can be made.³³⁼

There is the element of finality in this manifestation. We have in Jesus Christ the only perfect incarnation, God coming into the world of men as a human being... Our task and the task which has been that of the Church in the past, the present, and the end of time is that of interpretation and application of what has been conveyed in Christ to the varying and changing needs of men everywhere and at all times.³⁴

Mr. Jack C. Winslow warns that no syncretism between the two religions is possible. This is true because the

³²Soper, Op. Cit., pp. 142-143.

³³Ibid., pp. 176-177.

³⁴Ibid.

Christian Gospel is Jesus Christ Himself. No Hindu could accept the claim by Jesus Christ that he should have absolute lordship over his life and still remain a Hindu. Winslow says that the divide may be crossed by the way of personal commitment by the Hindu as well as the Christian. We can do much in removing barriers and misunderstandings. We can create friendships among the peoples. We can recognize that the Hindu has much to offer the world in terms of his striving for peace. We can seek to present the Christian Gospel in terms which the Indian Hindu can understand. Above all, we must witness to Christ in our personal lives so that the Hindu sees that there is a reflection of Christ's beauty and power in us. But, in the final resort, the Hindu himself must make that venture of personal self-surrender.³⁵ Then, Winslow suggests one further step which other commentators seem to have disregarded. The Hindu who becomes a Christian must make a public profession by the acceptance of Christian baptism. This is the point at which the hardest cost has to be faced. Hinduism, generally so tolerant of every form of religion, is most intolerant of those who break their caste by Christian

³⁵ Jack C. Winslow, The Christian Approach to the Hindu (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958), pp. 41-42.

baptism. Yet, if Christ's claim is to be absolute, no man can remain secretly a Christian, but outwardly a Hindu.³⁶

IV. CONCLUSION

Though a greater number of pages has been devoted to an interpretation of Hinduism itself than to the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism, this is a deliberate approach on my part. I personally did not have much information about Hinduism, and the more I studied, the more I realized the more information I needed. The small number of pages devoted to the relationship between the two religions does not indicate, I am convinced, any lack of powerful suggestions as to the possibilities of this relationship. And one will notice that the powerful suggestions have frequent footnotes as an indication that more able scholars than I can say it better and in fewer words.

During this study I was caught up in the excitement of seeing the possibilities of the relationship of the two religions. There have been times when I have been provoked at

³⁶Ibid., pp. 42-43.

audacity of some of the claims of both Christianity and Hinduism. On the other hand, having myself committed my life to the Christian faith, I found that the provocations were more frequent with the claims of the Hindu religion.

I am in close agreement and harmony with the conclusion of Dr. Soper and Mr. Winslow, and I must accept their reliability as scholars concerning the Hindu religion. What they have said makes a great deal of sense. This does not mean that I will be completely unmoved by the human virtues exhibited in the Hindu life, but, it does lead me to assert that I believe the ultimate principles indicated and the claims voiced in Christianity have greater validity than those of Hinduism. I say this as a Christian and recognize the tendency for prejudice, but does this mean that the religious prejudice of the Hindu is more acceptable than that of the Christian?

One very important fact was brought home to me during this research enterprise and that is that Hinduism is a more powerful force in the Western world than many persons realize. It cannot be met successfully with force or intolerance or sneering. The Christian must be aware of his own strength and assets with the uniqueness of the claim which he can make:

That Almighty God, Creator of the heavens and the earth and all in them, revealed Himself for us in Jesus Christ at a particular time and a particular place for the redemption of all mankind. Moreover, this student writer makes a final gesture of Christianity against the dynamic background of Hinduism and the comparison of some aspects of Christianity and Hinduism. This final gesture of interpretation and comparison is observed in the following elaborations and statements of conviction secular to this student author's Christian commitment and witness. For, this student seeks Christianity as the religion of the revelation of God in Christ.

It is cherished and advocated that of all religious narratives in the world, none is more beautiful than that which begins, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea . . . (Matthew 2:1).

Of all spiritual teachings that have been presented through heaven's holy men, none are more sublime than those that say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Of all the prayers that prophets prayed and of all the love that they shared, no prayer has ever brought the nature of God nearer or made it clearer than the prayer that begins, "Our Father who art in heaven. . ."(Matthew 6:9).

Of all the evidences of the power and glory of messiahship to which the world's scriptures testify, none lives deeper in the souls of men than the report, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Of all the promises that the scriptures of mankind hold out to men, of all the gospels of good news and hope with which the world is filled, no promise rings with greater hope than the words, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

On the other hand, from Golgotha the Christian story unfolds as on a screen. You see the lowly Galilean as Son of God and Son of man. You recognize him as the historical Jesus, working at his father's trade until the momentous day when he heard John the Baptist calling people to repent and proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom. When he comes to John to be baptized, Jesus has this wonderful assurance from the Father: "This is my beloved Son. . ."(Matthew 3:17). You see him as the living Christ, a divine reality working in the world today.

Brought into the world and pervading it by the grace of God, he is sustained in the world by his mystical Body, which is the Church of true believers.

From Golgotha we see him through the teachings of our faith and through vision, wisdom, hope, and inner longing, and that is why he is seen differently by different individuals. He came to fulfill the Law. For some he was a Jew who never traveled very far from the Jewish faith. To others he was a revolutionist against Judaism. To still others he was the Exemplary Man. To those who really knew him in the New Testament sense he was God incarnate.

You see it all from Golgotha. You see Christianity with its variegated followers--about 850,000,000, largest among all the religions of the world. You see its nearly 250,000 churches in the United States and its more than 250 denominational expressions. You see its schools, hospitals, homes, its great cathedrals, its lowly missions, its city chapels, and its wayside shrines. You see it in Rome and Moscow, in peace and war, in joy and in sorrow. Wherever and whenever man's highest relationship with God is contemplated, there Christianity is found. Christianity is the religion of the revelation of God in Christ.

Christianity is founded by a divine personality who is more than a prophet. For Christ was different and distinctive among prophets and religious teachers. He spoke with authority unlike that of any man. The Fatherhood of God showed forth in him. The brotherhood of man was revealed in him. He taught the meaning of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. He demonstrated neighborliness and nonresistance. He revealed the deepest insights into rewards and punishments. He brought a noble, persuasive gospel, using a child as an illustration of faith, a shepherd as a symbol of love, and a lowly Samaritan as an example of selfless service.

He had prophecies for those who benefited from them, signs for those who wanted them, and miracles for those who needed them. But for those who caught the glory of his presence, there was always the challenge for higher living and greater trust in God.

Let us look down into Jerusalem from Golgotha, and we can imagine what our Savior's triumphal march into the Temple area on that first Palm Sunday was like. We will remember the Feast of the Passover, the plot against him, the betrayal, arrest, trial, the release of Barabas, and the Crucifixion by the Romans on a hill where criminals were ignominiously put

to death. Perhaps it was here, here on this Golgotha, that his cross was lifted up. It was here, probably, that he looked out upon the world and up into the heart of God; it was here that he spoke the seven last words.

Throughout the hundreds of years that have passed since darkness fell over the city at the death of God's Anointed One, interpreters have been trying to define exactly what Christianity is, what it implies, and how it stands in relationship to other religions, including Hinduism, of mankind. Theologians have labeled it a revealed religion, a religion of regeneration and redemption, an experiential religion, a religion of the Logos, a faith of doctrine and deed.

From strictest orthodoxy to liberal humanism, from the coming of the Kingdom by an instantaneous miracle to its evolvment through struggle and growth, from evangelistic stress upon self-denial to the modern emphasis upon self-realization, Christianity has many expressions. But in every case, in every school of thought, in every sectarian camp, Christianity is the religion of the revelation of God in Christ. And it does not speak of a Christ whose life and teachings were snuffed out on a hangman's hill. For the most

part, this faith was founded not on the happenings of Golgotha but on what took place in a garden only a few hours later. There the sorrowing women who had come to anoint the dead body of their beloved Master found, instead, an empty tomb.

Now, parenthetically, let us leave Golgotha and go to the garden. Some call it the garden tomb, others the Garden of Joseph of Arimathea. It is a quiet, sequestered spot with flowers, a well, and an empty sepulchre. It qualifies well for Christendom's remembrance of the first hallowed Easter morn. "He is not here", the Scripture says, "for he has risen, as he said." (Matthew 28:6)

Here from the garden of the Resurrection you can look out across the Christian Era, and you can see the full sweep of Christianity in a new perspective, even as it is compared with Hinduism. You realize that with all its divisions, factions, and diversities it is actually more united than we realize. It is united in the risen Christ, and, because of this, the likeness of these groups outweigh their differences. The miracle of the garden is that all denominations and all expressions of Christianity can be assembled here, and still there is room.

There is room for the disciples from Thomas, the doubter, to impetuous Peter, Paul, the first great missionary, is here, and all the saints and martyrs of the early church are present. The followers of Christ--called "Christians" first at Antioch and recognized by their love for one another--they are here. Those who preserved the early letters of the Church--the Church Fathers--they are here also.

Walking in the garden, the scholar and the believing student must feel that the so-called heretics--those who opposed the fixed dogmas of the institutionalized church--were also here. For history does not deny the fact that Christianity frequently became involved in a struggle for power--political power, state power, and world power. All such problems were far from the intention of Jesus Christ and were greatly opposed to the simple teachings that he had proclaimed. Always there have been those who saw Christianity as God's sword to conquer the "heathen." Constantine the Great claimed that on his way to Rome at the head of his warring troops he saw, as in a vision, a flaming cross against the sky. And over the cross he saw the words, "In this sign conquer!"

Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, and the Church grew. Indeed, there were centuries in which it was known as the Holy Catholic Church, and emperors were crowned and dethroned, "holy wars" were encouraged, and crusades were instigated. The idea was to "save" Christianity from gagan threats, to convert the "heathen", to capture Jerusalem, and even to find the cup from which the Christ drank at his Passover Feast with his disciples.

Finally, no other religion, including Hinduism, presents the claim or proves the claim that Christianity has made to the world. No other scripture leads men away from the garden tomb as confidently and as beautifully as does the Christian story: "Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them." (Luke 24:50-51) "And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" (Acts 1:10-11). This, too, is the Christian hope--that Jesus Christ will come again. And this, also, is interpreted in countless ways by the Hindu believers and the 850,000,000 citizens of Christendom.

Their views are many; their opinions are varied and strongly individualized. But in the deepest spirit of their quest, there is a basic, irrevocable agreement. A united conviction is expressed in a universally accepted and dearly loved text that every Christian knows, respects, and believes: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

For Christianity is the religion of the revelation of God in Christ. And, at this juncture in this student's life and religious quest for God, he is determined and resolved to remain a faithful witness to the tenets and faith of Christianity, even though he is intellectually persuaded to respect and appreciate the strength and weakness aspects of both Christianity and Hinduism.

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